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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000200

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STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, NSC FOR RAMCHAND, LONDON FOR TSOU,
PARIS FOR ZEYA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/21/2015
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KU](#) [SUCCESSION](#)
SUBJECT: SUCCESSION STRUGGLE: JABERS VS. SALEMS WITH
PARLIAMENT STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

REF: KUWAIT 184 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Dr. Yousef Al-Zalzalah, a moderate Shi'a member of Parliament, told visitors to his diwaniya (traditional gathering) the evening of January 21 that the National Assembly had received two contradictory requests: one from the Cabinet to begin proceedings to declare Shaykh Saad medically unfit to be Amir and the other from Shaykh Saad, via agents, calling for a special parliamentary session on January 22 at 6:30pm to take the constitutionally-mandated Amiri oath. The latest reports on succession suggest Shaykh Saad is still insisting on holding the special parliamentary session, though ruling family members are in intense negotiations to resolve the leadership controversy. Dr. Saad Bin Teflah told Poloffs at his diwaniya that the ruling family dispute was being exacerbated by the "younger Shaykhs" from the Al-Salem and the Al-Jaber branches of the Al-Sabah family who feared being left out of any long-term compromise deal on succession. Bin Teflah claimed the Al-Salems feel it is their turn to exercise political power, even through a physically incapacitated Amir. Kuwaitis are expressing common disappointment in the ruling family for letting their differences deteriorate to such a point, but also evince confidence that a solution will finally be reached. End summary.

Leading MP: Parliament Received Contradictory Requests

¶2. (C) In visits to diwanis (traditional gatherings) the evening of January 21, Kuwaitis shared with Poloffs their views on the succession crisis currently dominating discussion in Kuwait. Dr. Yousef Al-Zalzalah, a moderate Shi'a member of Parliament (MP), told visitors to his diwaniya that the National Assembly had received two conflicting letters on January 21: one from the Council of Ministers requesting activation of Article 3 of the Succession Law, which provides for removal of the Amir for health reasons (reftel), and the other from Amir-designate Shaykh Saad Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah calling for a special parliamentary session to allow him to take the constitutionally-mandated Amiri oath. Al-Zalzalah noted that, procedurally, Amiri requests should come through the Council of Ministers, which is chaired by Prime Minister Shyakh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, widely seen as the exclusive candidate to replace Shaykh Saad, rather than directly from the Amir. According to Al-Zalzalah, National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi requested a meeting with Shaykh Saad to explain the proper procedures, but was turned down.

¶3. (C) Al-Zalzalah also outlined a couple of scenarios that could throw the country into a "constitutional crisis." What

if the requisite two-thirds majority (44 votes) in Parliament needed to remove the Amir for health reasons was not obtained? What if the 16 Government Ministers, who are ex officio MPs, did not attend the special Amiri oath-taking session, if held? He admitted that he could not answer his own questions, but speculated that constitutional issues would be referred to the Constitutional Court. He expressed frustration that the Al-Sabah family had not resolved its internal differences prior to the Amir's death, but he was confident that family members would do so soon. Al-Zalzalah said MPs would meet on January 22 to determine how to respond to the conflicting requests. (Note: The latest reports are that the Council of Ministers was also meeting January 22 to prepare a medical report on Shaykh Saad, which it intends to submit to Parliament to facilitate the activation of Article 3 of the Succession Law. However, there are also reports that Shaykh Saad's doctor will not sign the report. The doctor was dumped as Health Minister by Shaykh Sabah last year. End note.)

Al-Salems and "Younger Shaykhs" Demand Their Turn

¶4. (C) Dr. Saad Bin Teflah, professor at Kuwait University and a former Minister of Information, told Poloffs at his diwaniya that the current internal family dispute was exacerbated by the "younger Shaykhs" of both the Jaber and Salem branches who feared being edged out of power by a long-term compromise arrangement on succession. Without naming names, he insinuated that Energy Minister Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah -- only 42, but widely rumored to be corrupt and ambitious -- was part of the problem, as well as former ministers not from the Al-Jaber branch who were replaced when Shaykh Sabah became Prime

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Minister in 2003. (Note: Shaykh Mohammed Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah was replaced as Minister of Interior by Shaykh Sabah. Other contacts have suggested he is one of the key family members resisting Shaykh Sabah's assumption of the amirship. End note.)

¶5. (C) According to Bin Teflah, Al-Salems feel it is their turn to exercise political power, even through a physically incapacitated Amir: a situation they argue is similar to the Jabers' exercise of political power under the ailing Amir Shaykh Jaber. Bin Teflah claimed some Al-Salems would even like to issue a decree stripping Shaykh Sabah of his power. (Comment: The de facto ruler of Kuwait for the past five years, Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah has considerable power and broad public support. It is highly unlikely that he could be removed from his current position or realistically prevented from becoming Amir. End comment.)

Kuwaitis Disappointed, But Trust Constitutional Process

¶6. (C) Among all the rumors, gossip, and speculation in Kuwait about ruling family negotiations over succession, there is a common sense of disappointment that the Al-Sabah family let things deteriorate to this point. Kuwaitis respect the ruling family and defer to its members on succession issues, but feel embarrassed that the family's dirty laundry would be aired in such a public and humiliating way. Bin Teflah noted, however, that there is a positive side to the current situation: public debates focus on the constitutionality of succession procedures, an indication, according to Bin Teflah, of the depth of political freedom in the country and the commitment to upholding the Constitution.

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LeBaron